COL. RICHARD A. BOOKER
Randolph House Proprietor

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The Fortifications At High Bridge

This photograph of High Bridge was made a few weeks after the battle. Repairs are being made to the sections which the retreating Confederates burned; this view is looking toward the Farmville side.

WHEN the first High Bridge was built by the Southside Railroad across the Appomattox River near Farmville in 1852, Chief Engineer C. H. Dimmock declared that "the piers have been higher bridges not so long and longer bridges not so high, but this is, perhaps, the largest bridge in the world."

Whether that may be, it certainly was the most important bridge in the world to General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia on April 7, 1865. It was, he thought, not only a means of getting his army across the river, but the entire line of retreat from Petersburg. A note from Whittier to de Trobriand states that a decision to abandon the Petersburg-Richmond defense system was made on the morning of April 7 under a "good and judicious officer" to obtain supplies from the country, since the Confederates had only enough rations to last left with each family.

Before the Federals reached Farmville, Lee, on the morning of April 7, was in the process of withdrawing the remainder of the Army of Northern Virginia from the trenches left their homes that day. The evacuees did not go far; however, but merely moved to the other side of the town limits, for in the days when they were filled with guns and gun-clad soldiers, the streets of the town were considered to be within the Confederate lines.

Nevertheless, because the main line has been moved nightly, and a new bridge erected, and the trees have grown up, and the fields have been plowed under, and only keen eyes can pick them out from train windows flashing by.

Actually, the fortifications on both sides of the river—are a series, and the tragic part of their story is that they were never completed for the purpose for which they were intended. But that's looking ahead.

To understand what took place at High Bridge on April 7, it is first necessary to examine the events that led up to it.

The Army of Northern Virginia, under Lee, left Petersburg and Richmond, divided into three columns with infantry, cavalry, artillery and wagons. The first rendezvous was at Amelia Court House, several miles north of Blackstone. Many of the wagons, however, did not arrive there were impassable and the columns constantly had to re-route themselves. Federal skirmishers had been bothersome all of the wagon trains from Richmond were caught and destroyed by the Federal cavalry. Lee was in a hurry, and, at Jetersville, he ordered them to be abandoned. Nobody told Gordon, however, and he, following orders, trailed the wagon tracks, and so moved out of the right-of-way of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Advised of this, Lee ordered his column to march all night and all the next day on west for Amelia Springs and Deatonville. This was on April 5. The next morning, with both columns moving in the same direction, and being pressed by the Federal cavalry and the Federal infantry, his marching order for greater speed and protection, was changed to put his wagons, General Lee was in the van, followed by General Longstreet's corps, then Mahone, Anderson, Ewell, the wagon trains and Gordon's corps, which was to protect the supplies and serve as rear-guard.

Another incident of interest occurred at Amelia Springs. Here, on the night of the 5th, General Lee, lying at the root of a pine, General Presley Talliaferro, a Virginian of the Stonewall Jackson school, and later his rector, came with the suggestion of surrender. Presley Talliaferro was a deeply religious man, however, had agreed that further resistance was useless and out of sympathy for General Lee and his hard lot, he had come to urge him to surrender. Lee, however, was in no mood to listen to such talk, and he would not be interrupted.

Grant's proposal to Lee for surrender was not made without knowledge that Lee was in a serious predicament. Before a conversation between General Ewell, Lee's adjutant, Colonel Walter Taylor, and Humphreys, with his infantry corps cut off from the other Federal troops, was north of the river and was confronted by Ewell's corps, which had been ordered to go to his support. As his men passed the Randolph House, they recognized their commander, and, as they had done frequently since they lighted bonfires along the street. Taking straw and pine knots, they Wright replied (5:10 p.m.) immediately that "already home with shouts of victory" went up, bands played, banners were waved, and the men cheered lustily. Lee and caught as they came down. It was a demonstration of genuine affection for which had brought the men so near to the victorious conclusion of a hard war. the informal but spontaneously happy passage of Wright's Corps.

On the March April 7

April 7 was passing before the Confederates left their positions, which appear to have been impregnable, and moved toward Grant that he was moving his headquarters to Rice to have telegraphic communication with Burkeville, Jetersville and a half later, he reported hearing heavy firing in the direction of Humphreys' position on the stage and could not be gotten across, however, until the plank roads covered and sent for help; an attack by Mahone on Sheridan's flank.

Grant replied (5:30 p.m.) that upon receipt of Webb's latest order that Humphreys was confronted by the entire Army of Northern Virginia, and that the Twenty-Fourth Corps could throw up a bridge over the Appomattox, he would go to the front. Grant, however, changed his mind later, he informed Webb that he had crossed and set up headquarters near a farmhouse on the road from Farmville to Lynchburg. Grant, however, was still on the south side of the river, and in front of Humphreys' position on the stage road, about a mile and a half from the bridge.

Grant's Army of the Potomac had been moving in three columns, the Second Corps on the right, the Fifth Corps in the center, and the Sixth Corps on the left. Grant's plan was to have the Second Corps cross the river at Farmville, and then, with the Fifth Corps, to move down the north side of the river to Rice's Station, where he would be in position to cut off Lee's retreat to Danville. The Sixth Corps was at Farmville, and Grant ordered Meade to move it to the north side of the river.

Grant's headquarters on the night of April 7 were in the yard of the house on the road following the Twenty-fourth Corps at 6:00 a.m., April 8. The Second and Sixth Corps were to follow the Confederates north of the river.

Sheridan's Raid

General Charles Griffin's Fifth Corps reached Prince Edward Court House at 7:30 p.m., April 7. Sheridan had already passed through the village. According to Lee's account, Sheridan's cavalry had arrived at Appomattox Station at 4:00 p.m. on April 8, and had captured a number of the wagon trains. Sheridan had left Prince Edward Court House at 3:00 a.m., April 8. The Second and Sixth Corps were to follow the Confederates in a wide sweep to the north of the river.

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Meanwhile, Grant, in the McLean house, near the Courthouse, terms of surrender were drawn up, and on April 9 was signed. Northern Virginia laid down its arms, to fight no more for the Cause they had so valiantly defended. And so, at last, ended it was in the home of a man, on whose farm near Manassas Junction in Prince William County the first battle of the war had been fought. First Manassas, that Lee and Grant drew up the terms of peace, so that a reunited nation was built, a loyal portion of a reunited republic.

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The men left Appomattox on a hard road, a road of disappointment and hopelessness, but a road of determination and hope. And he who had led his men in war so many times, now led them in peace, and here was found material resources had been destroyed, but whose spiritual resources had passed through the gates of defeat unscathed: the gold was refined; from the ashes which marked the site of plantation and city and village, and factory, throughout the South arose — arose not on material foundations alone, but on spiritual and more sublime, the human will to live, the human purpose to survive the human determination to rise above defeat and pain. And not merely human effort but Southern people turned to seek Divine aid. sought to know the Divine will and purpose, so that a reunited nation was built, a loyal portion of a reunited republic.

Main Bank Building
Third at Main Streets
FARMVILLE, VIRGINIA
ESTABLISHED 1900

Left—Branch Bank Building
Shopping Center
Farmville, Va.

Right—Branch Bank Building
Pamplin City, Va.

FIRST NATIONAL BANK

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And Pamplin City, Virginia

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THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK extends an invitation to all citizens and invites each to use the facilities for their financial needs.

The Current Artist Photo

"The General", famed Civil War Steam locomotive as it passed over High Bridge, heading for Farmville in May 1963, as part of the continuing Centennial observance. Notice the old, original foundations of the bridge running parallel to the present track.

This is the way the bridge looked in 1865, as drawn by Alfred R. Waud, famed Civil War artist. Waud's sketch was published in Harper's Weekly, June 10 Through courtesy Blandford Church.

the cavalry fight he gathered up "in squads of 10 and a dozen" some of the stragglers who were on the south side of the bridge. By this time, High Bridge was one of the last crossings directly before it a wagon road bridge was also available for passage.

Meade's army, which had closely pulled up to the bridge at dawn on April 7 as saw first the bridges burning merrily and then he saw the redoubt which was to guard the structure standing empty and half-burned by Confederate demolition. Meade's memorandum (quoted in de Peyster's La Royale): "A considerable force of the enemy's infantry, with artillery, about 1,200 yards from the river. On our side this side there was low marshy ground for the space of 500 yards, then the ground rose to the crest on which the redoubt was placed, enfiladed by redoubt and artillery. They had no skirmishers out—at least in front—no pickets at or near the wagon bridge."

"The works on the southeast bank of the river command the bridge and serve as a bridgehead and defend the approaches to the bridge," Meade said. "The enemy's infantry coming up the railroad caught Lee at Appomattox Station and in front of Pamplin. A large smoke in the direction of Farmville led Angel to believe that the High Bridge was being burned."

Not only Dickinson "was stripped of everything," but many another along the entire line of Lee's retreat. A note from Whittier to de Trobriand states that a division came on the morning of April 7 under a "good and judicious officer" to obtain supplies from the country, since the Confederates had only enough rations to last left with each family.

The scrap wasn't as easy or bloodless as that. The Federals came out on the south side of the river, however, but were managing to save most of the railroad bridge, and enough of the road bridge to be used after a few repairs.

In short, it resembles, the long by side—these earthworks are more within there are large circular depressions which, although their positions upon the heights beyond ments. From the inside, the height of to six or eight. Through the middle runs a spine of earth. Near it and enough to permit the passage of a man, is cut evidently as a communication

bridge, and enough of the road bridge for it to be used after a few repairs. Of Federal dead.

When the Yankees brought up Federals withdrew. The whole business was over by 9:15 a. m. and when the sealed.

Contemporary reports mention number and in de Peyster's account he says that "whoever commanded at High Bridge—it was Mahone—had by no means left enough men to hold it." Actually nearly 90 years after the event the remains are still impressive. There are longely intact, and the third just a fragment. This last is on the left side some 1,500 yards from the river. It is 60 feet high, and is located 500 yards farther along, on the right side of the track, is the first intact roughly 100 yards from the track and at the end of a stretch of high ground bridge to the river.

In shape it resembles, the long side facing the river. At several places

The fort the battle took place

overgrown with briars and tree stumps.

on the right of the track, is the best preserved position of all. Designed

In any case the Federals got across the bridge, and, on the afternoon of Sunday afternoon, Lee surrendered the remains of "the once great Army of Northern Virginia" to Lieut. Gen. U. S. Grant, Commanding Armies of the United States, in a farmhouse belonging to a farm near Manassas, by a strange

About the early burning of the two bridges the late Dr. Douglas Southall developed that a "... blunder had been made: ... The delay in setting the wagon misunderstanding of the usual sort. The engineers had been directed to burn the bridges, but the order (Special Orders

[Editor Note: Reprinted with permission from the Sunday Herald-Traveler, Boston, January 1963.]